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John Muir Newsletter, November/December 1982

Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies

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JOHN MUIR NEWSLETTER



Holt-Atherton Pacific Center
for Western Studies

University of the Pacific
Stockton, Calif 95211

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FUNDING UPDATE

Christmas came in November for the John Muir Papers Microform Project. On November 16 we received word from Oakland, California, that the Muir Project had been awarded a \$10,000 grant from the L.J. Skaggs and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation, a private agency which supports many environmental and educational activities. At the end of the month we received a call from N.H.P.R.C. headquarters in Washington, informing us that the Publications and Records Commission has made a tentative award of \$42,000 to the Muir Project for the 1983 fiscal year. At the same time we learned that an additional \$10,000 had been earmarked for the Muir Project from funds awarded to the N.H.P.R.C. by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation of Palo Alto, California. This latter money will be used to publish the printed guide to the microform edition. The funding provided by these three agencies will enable us to meet our 1983 budget and will keep us on schedule for project completion by 1984. To those of you who assisted us with letters of recommendation and support, we are truly grateful.

PROJECT UPDATE

Organization and preparation of control cards for the manuscripts series of the John Muir Papers has been the principal objective of the Project staff this fall. To date, some 7,000 pages of holographs and typescripts have been identified, evaluated, arranged, and numbered. Original order has been retained or restored whenever possible and determinable.

In January, Photo historian and consultant, Peter Palmquist of Humboldt State will visit Project headquarters to assist us in developing systems of arrangement and control for the 2,500 photographs in the Muir collection. An invaluable research tool, this series includes

works by Taber, Watkins, Reilly, Merriam, and other noted 19th century landscape photographers.

In anticipation of our goal to begin filming by 1983, we have undertaken a preliminary test of the reproduction capabilities of some of the least legible of the Muir papers scheduled for the microform publication. These include several field journals Muir carried on his Alaska trips, in which he wrote and sketched in soft pencil. Some pages are nearly obliterated by smudging, but careful conservation and restoration techniques may be able to develop sufficient contrast values to make facsimilie reproductions possible. If not, selective transcription may be necessary to provide readable copy.

THE "MUIR BOX" NOW PART OF THE MUIR COLLECTION AT UOP

The last issue described this charming writing case, complete with a brass nameplate that reads "J. Muir 1870". Although we still have not been able to authenticate its original ownership, the most recent owners, Dr. and Mrs. Vernon Carstenson, generously donated it to the Holt-Atherton Center, where it now rests in quiet repose next to the papers that we hope were prepared on it. If you have any clues that can help link this case to "The" John Muir, please let us hear from you.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

By 1985 scholars of the world will have unlimited access to the John Muir papers on microfilm. What can we expect to come of new research based on this comprehensive collection that has not been available heretofore in its entirety? While it would be folly to attempt to predict the scope of future Muir scholarship, we might briefly hint at some possible patterns of inquiry. At the personal and family level, opening these papers will enable scholars to probe the full dimensions of this remarkably complex personality. One obvious biographical need is to investigate Muir's literary antecedents, a task made easier by the Holt-Atherton Pacific Center's recent acquisition of over 500 books from Muir's personal library, complete with holograph indices and notes at the back of most volumes. On a broader level, the Muir papers will be of great assistance in studying the origins and growth of the environmental lobby in the United States. Perhaps most significant, Muir's role as a rebellious intellectual during the crucial transitional years from 1890 to World War I is clearly revealed in these papers. He and other dissenters, by attacking traditional material values, helped lay the groundwork for a major cultural transformation in the 20th century.

FROM JOHN MUIR'S SCRAPBOOK

The heavy snowfall this year reminds us once again that California weather patterns are unpredictable. Contrast this season with the winter of 1888-89, as reported on by John Muir in an article published in the [San Francisco] Daily Evening Bulletin June 22, 1889:

THE SNOW

Result of John Muir's Investigations in the Sierra.

A Lighter Fall than Known Since the Settlement of the State.

*What May Be Now Seen in a Trip Through the Mountains-Rivers
and Streams Full-The Forests in High Altitudes.*

John Muir has recently been prosecuting some investigations in the Sierra, and writes as follows from Yosemite concerning the snow in the mountains:

The snow on the mountains lies comparatively light this year, lighter perhaps, than ever was known since the settlement of the State. Far back on the higher mountain slopes among the peaks of the summit snow still exists in abundance, deep bossy drifts and sheets, and piled up masses shot down in avalanches upon the glaciers which with the innumerable springs issuing from moraines that have been replenished from snow recently melted are now lavishly supplying the rivers. Everywhere throughout the middle region is heard the happy rush and dance of rejoicing water. But the supply will not last through the dry summer in anything like its present fullness. Many of the shorter tributaries will soon begin to fall, and only those draining the glaciers and the cool northern slopes of the summit peaks will continue to flow on with steady currents to the time of fresh snowfalls at the close of the year. During an excursion that I made a few days ago to the head waters of the Merced and Tuolumne I found, even at a height of from 8,000 to 9,500 feet above the sea, only small local patches of snow, of no great depth, in the cooler shadows of the rocks and woods, and these are vanishing rapidly, where usually one would find a depth of five or six feet. Excursions into the high Sierra, that in seasons of average snowfall could not be made with animals until some time in July, may now be undertaken without difficulty, the few patches of deep snow still lying on the north slopes of forested ridges being easily passed. The robins are already singing on the glaciers meadows, and the grass is green and the early flowers that have escaped the destructive tramping and biting of the sheep are coming into bloom. The young Paton spruces and pines growing at an elevation of 10,000 feet, usually at this time still bent and buried beneath a massive mantle of snow, are erect in the sunshine and stirring with new life, showing signs of new leaves and cones. ...

IN THE WOODS

In the deep woods up to a height of eight thousand feet the snow lies mostly where it falls, until it is thawed and set free to sing its way back to the sea. But on the bleak slopes above the timber line, and the long glacier meadows, and through the lighter forests of the two-leaf pine, there is much wild, fierce drifting during storms when the temperature is low and the snow is dry and dusty. Then the

"The Snow" cont.

great pines and firs bending in the darkening blast roar like feeding lions, and ever and anon the deep muffled booming of avalanches are heard as the laden mountains shed off huge masses that gather into deep gullies and side cañons and descend beneath whirling clouds of snow dust to the glaciers and meadows and lake basins in the hollows. Then the shaggy chaparral is buried and the young groves and all the streams of the middle region which then have to flow in long, dark tunnels burrowing beneath the snow like marmots. Magnificent over-curling cornices are formed on the high ridges where the winds sweep free, and under certain conditions of the snow and direction of the wind, long waving banners of snow are displayed at the tops of the peaks along the axis of the range, proclaiming the glorious power and gladness of the storm. And when at length, after days and nights of darkness and roar, the sky is clear again and the winds die away, marvellously beautiful is the scene that the sun looks down upon. The bloom of the meadows of the sky covers all the landscape. Every tree in the broad-spreading zones of the forests, round bossy domes, rugged ridges and rock-piles; meadows, bogs and brown, withered gardens, the dead and the living, all are laden and blooming with the borrowed flowers of the storm-clouds.

And when the last storm has fallen and the sun with increasing heat withdraws the crystal snow from the landscape, the lost streams are set free to run in the light, the meadows take on their own proper bloom, the bent groves arise, birds and bears and all the other mountain people come back to their summer homes, and over ever[ly] height and hollow life and joy refreshed and replenished proclaim the glorious story of the snow on the mountains.

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